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Reagan hails CIA and new chief

By Bill Gertz
The Washington Times

President Reagan yesterday pledged his support for a "vigorous" U.S. intelligence apparatus and hailed the CIA as an indispensable tool "for the continued expansion of freedom."

Mr. Reagan, in a speech marking the installation of William Webster as the 14th director of central intelligence, also criticized CIA opponents who, he said, "act as if the CIA were somehow not completely a part of our own government."

"The United States cannot survive in the modern world without a vigorous intelligence agency capable of acting swiftly and in secret," Mr. Reagan said during swearing-in ceremonies at the agency's McLean headquarters.

"So long as I am president, I will never consent to see our intelligence capability undermined."

Mr. Webster, a former federal judge whose nomination for CIA director was confirmed by the Senate last week, told the gathering of senior U.S. officials and several hundred agency employees that he will work closely with policymakers "to put truth into action."

"We will work with the intelligence community to mobilize our vast talent and resources to better

serve our common purpose," Mr. Webster said. "And we will diligently carry out our assignments around the world, however difficult, with fidelity to the Constitution and the laws of our beloved country, so help us God."

The president, in his remarks, said intelligence work requires secrecy and thus "successes can only be celebrated in private."

"But those of us in the executive branch and Congress know about these gallant efforts and recognize ... [that] the continued expansion of freedom must rest on a solid intelligence foundation," he said.

Mr. Reagan also praised the late CIA chief William Casey, who died earlier this month, for his "determination and personal courage" as a World War II spymaster and for his six years at the CIA's helm.

The CIA has been strengthened after a period during the late 1970s when "we found America's intelligence capabilities reduced and demoralized," Mr. Reagan said.

Today, the CIA plays a "vital role" in the struggle against international terrorism and drug trafficking; "exposes and counters the huge, menacing apparatus of Soviet espionage and propaganda; and scouts future challenges," Mr. Reagan said.

Quoting Mr. Casey, the president said the spy business was no place

for "tender egos or shrinking violets."

"It is instead a place for people who are willing to make a commitment to serve their country in a challenging environment, where one person can indeed make a difference," Mr. Reagan said. "William Hedgcock Webster is just such a man."

Mr. Reagan also honored Mr. Webster, who left his post as FBI director to take the CIA job, for strengthening the bureau and building morale during his nine-year tenure.

"In becoming director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Judge Webster is stepping up to the leadership of an institution that by its very nature is a likely subject of controversy," he said. "It is also irreplaceable."

Mr. Reagan made no mention of the Iran-Contra covert operations that are being probed by congressional and judicial investigators.

Mr. Webster was sworn in by Supreme Court Justice Lewis F. Powell, a former electronic intelligence specialist who worked in Britain during World War II helping to break Nazi codes.

Also at the ceremony were Vice President George Bush, a former CIA director, and several other former CIA chiefs.

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Photo by Walter Oates The Washington Times

President Reagan chuckles at a remark by William Webster (right) at the swearing-in of the CIA director yesterday.